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SUBJECT: SE GRATION VISITS KASS IDP CAMPS AND IDP RETURN VILLAGE

REF: KHARTOUM 857

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Summary  
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11. (U) On July 18, U.S. Special Envoy (SE) to Sudan J. Scott Gration and his delegation traveled to Kass to assess remaining expulsion-related gaps in Kass town's internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and to visit a village of reported returns. During meetings with Kass's largely Fur tribe IDPs, SE Gration said the expulsions of 13 international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in early March had resulted in a large setback for Kass, with little recovery in some areas. The Special Envoy emphasized the U.S. Government's (USG) commitment to ensuring that gaps are filled, but also underscored the need to address the long-term situation, with IDPs needing to help themselves as part of the solution. The delegation's visit to Tabaldia Um Oshush, a returns site, was an indication that some IDPs are voluntarily returning to areas they now deem safe. In discussions with local officials, the SE underscored the importance of permitting the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to work in South Darfur to verify reports of returns and assess needs for populations in these areas. End summary.

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Kass Sheikhs: "Without Practical Action, No Need to Talk"  
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12. (U) With approximately 90,000 IDPs in 37 settlement sites, as well as approximately 35,000 host community residents, Kass town was clearly affected by the early March NGO expulsions. Sanitation and medical services are the greatest need areas following the expulsions.

13. (U) SE Gration opened the meeting with the Kass camps' Fur tribal sheikhs (IDP leaders) by asking them to look to the future: Where would they and their children be in five years, and what could they do now in assuring a brighter future for themselves? None of the sheikhs addressed the SE's questions. Rather, they complained that of the 13 organizations expelled in March, five had been working in Kass. They listed concerns for hygiene and sanitation in Kass camps, stating that some latrines are full and that no space exists for construction of new latrines.

¶4. (U) The leaders said that Kass IDPs needed international help not only on such practical issues, but also on security and land occupation. They reported that Fur land, primarily in Wadi Saleh, had been occupied by Arab migrants from other countries whom they claimed had been invited in by the government. The IDPs stated that they needed the international community's help in disarming militias and removing those occupying their land. Only then could they return to live with peace and dignity in their places of origin. In answer to the SE's question on resolving land tenure issues, the IDP leaders said they themselves were not involved. The sheikhs maintained that they did not have weapons, and consequently could not remove armed people from their lands. "We cannot return without protection", one of the IDPs said. The IDPs alleged that voluntary returns discussed in the local media were part of the Sudanese government's "propaganda" campaign.

¶5. (SBU) SE Gration summarized his discussions in Paris with exiled Fur leader, Abdul Wahid. He noted that the latter did not want to participate in peace negotiations in Doha. He said such a refusal was counterproductive to achieving peace and security in Darfur. The sheikhs expressed skepticism about the value of the peace talks. They said that if they were to attempt to unite, the government would detain and harass the organizers. [Note: Several National Security staff showed up and listened to the entire meeting, which was held in an open location within one of the Kass town IDP settlements. End note.] The IDP leaders asserted that the people negotiating in Doha had not consulted with the IDPs. The sheikhs said they supported Abdul Wahid in his refusal to negotiate without the disarmament of militias, noting: "Without practical action, there is no need to talk." SE Gration urged the IDPs to tell Abdul Wahid's commanders that they wanted the IDPs to seek to have their

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voice hear in the process of determining wealth-sharing and other issues affecting their future. The Special Envoy told them that in backing Abdul Wahid their "future is in his hands, and his hands are in Paris. You need someone who is working for you in Darfur". SE Gration emphasized that IDPs must organize themselves to gain a common voice; otherwise, they and their children would remain in the camps into the future. While the IDP leaders listened politely, it was clear they were not responsive to this message. Echoing Abdul Wahid's views, several of the sheikhs said SE Gration had "disappointed them" through his "denial" that genocide had occurred in Darfur. The SE responded by saying that this was not in fact what he had said. He recommended that the sheikhs read his statements, rather than rely on reports from others, a reference to Abdul Wahid's continuing propaganda campaign inside the Fur communities.

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Kass Humanitarian Services: More Empty Clinic Beds, Significant Remaining Gaps  
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¶6. (U) SE Gration and the delegation visited the former International Rescue Committee (IRC) clinic in Kass. Although the latter has substantial, recently-constructed facilities, the clinic is now devoid of patients. USAID partner Humedica told the Special Envoy that the South Darfur State Ministry of Health (SMOH) lacks the capacity and funding to consistently staff and support the health clinic, resulting in low usage by the IDP community. In contrast, Humedica operates another, smaller clinic in Kass, as well as mobile clinics on the town's periphery, that have seen patient caseloads increase dramatically since the expulsions.

¶7. (U) Humedica staff noted that World Vision has discussed taking over the former IRC clinic. However, Humedica staff said that it will take time for World Vision or any other interested NGOs to make the clinic operational again. Such NGOs will also need government permission to re-start the clinic's operations. In the meantime, two NGOs with a much smaller presence and capacity will continue to provide services that six NGOs previously offered.

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Tabaldia Um Oshush  
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¶18. (U) The delegation traveled eight kilometers outside of Kass town to visit Tabaldia Um Oshush, a reported returns village. In early July, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the UN World Food Program (WFP) received reports from a national NGO that approximately 1,500 households from Kass had moved to neighboring villages. The national NGO reported that the highest priorities for the newly-arrived households included provision of food, relief commodities, agricultural inputs, and water, as well as school rehabilitation.

¶19. (U) Those in the settlement told SE Gration that they had returned from Kass town IDP camps in recent weeks, and that Tabaldia Um Oshush was their village of origin. The residents stated that they had fled the village during inter-ethnic fighting between the Terjam and the Rizeigat, both Arab groups. Subsequent reconciliation initiated by the two groups themselves led the IDPs to return to the village. However, when questioned regarding which of the 37 Kass IDP settlements they had recently returned from, the residents provided differing answers, although all claimed they had never had IDP ration cards. After promising to return to the village to conduct further assessments, a UN representative emphasized the need for additional verification measures on the returns. He added that it was important for the UN to provide assistance to such populations, no matter what their status, especially if additional conversations revealed that they needed such help.

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Comment  
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¶10. (U) Kass IDP camps were hard-hit by the March 4 NGO expulsions.

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Medical care and sanitation are two of the service areas where the gap is still being felt. The two international NGOs now working in Kass are unable at this time to fill the gap in medical and sanitation capacity left by the expulsions. The urgency of filling this gap may increase with the onset of the rainy season. It is not only the IDP population that is affected by a lack of services, but also the host community as well. The latter depends on the support of relief agencies to reduce the strain of hosting 90,000 IDPs.

¶11. (U) The visit to Tabaldia Um Oshush underscored the importance of the Special Envoy's request to the Wali, Ali Mahmoud Mohamed, and his deputy, Dr. Farah Mustafa Abdullah (who reputedly holds the real power in the region) that the International Organization of Migration be allowed to work in South Darfur. IOM should conduct verification missions and assess related needs, particularly if the security situation improves to allow additional returns.

¶12. (U) Special Envoy Gration reviewed and approved this cable.

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